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ABSTRACT

Nel Noddings' "Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education" (1984) represents a feminist view of the caring teacher-pupil relationship, focusing on the personal and social setting and speaking directly about the relationship. The works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty contribute a phenomenological perspective which is universal and culturally based and, in describing human relationships, implies a point of view on the teacher-pupil relationship. An exploration of the similarities and differences between these two views yields implications for education, the two parties in the teacher-student relationship, and their shared world. Both points of view relate to the existential interpretation of life and the importance of human relationships. In both, individual choice making constructs the solution to moral dilemmas. Both include concreteness and an emphasis on defining values, forming relationships, and signifying the impact of the individual on an experience. In contrast, while Noddings attends to society, its institutions, and their impact on human relationships, with special emphasis on the educational domain, Merleau-Ponty considers the interaction of culture, universal human tendencies, and the socio-political world. Individuality, the significance of decision making, and freedom appear less clear cut, more complex, and enigmatic than in Noddings' narrative. Noddings' focus is on the teacher-pupil relationship, but with many examples of mother-child rearing. Merleau-Ponty's perspective on intersubjectivity--the connection of all persons historically and culturally--provides a sense of universality to his person-centered philosophy. The Noddings version is directly applicable to American education. Merleau-Ponty's message must be sought, but when discovered, the question of relationships, particularly the teacher-pupil relationship, may best be seen in Merleau-Ponty's vision. However, specific characteristics and outcomes lie with each teacher and student linked in the education event. One seeking to identify the caring teacher-pupil relationship would profit by consulting both models--the personal and particular focus as well as the universal and cultural design. (ND)

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Running Head: CARING TEACHER-PUPIL

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Caring Teacher-Pupil Relationship: Feminist or Phenomenological?

The caring teacher-pupil relationships, either feminist or phenomenological, share some similarities as well as differences. Both based on a moral foundation, contribute insights on the role of the relationship and its involvement in the world. Nel Noddings' Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (1984) represents a feminist view. The works of Maurine Merleau-Ponty contribute the phenomenological perspective. Both philosophers represent an existential perspective, with the phenomenological included in Merleau-Ponty's construct. His philosophy is universal and culturally based. Noddings' focus is the social setting and has a personal emphasis. Morality — its presence in human lives, its description, and its need — looms large in both works. Noddings speaks directly about the teacher-pupil relationship. Merleau-Ponty, in describing human relationships, implies a point of view on the teacher-pupil relationship.

In the following discussion, both views on the caring educational relationship are given. A comparison/contrast of the two highlight similarities and differences with implications for education, the two proponents in the relationship, and their shared world. Is one version of the caring relationship more powerful and appropriate than the other?

Is each, focusing on separate spheres, non-comparable to the other? Are they mutually supportive in their perspectives on the relationship?

Care

Care, to Noddings, exemplifies engrossment which includes protection, solicitude for another, and a commitment to the cared-for. It can be a risky leap into the unknown for the care-giver — but necessary for one's personal growth as well as advancement for the other. In her view, caring is intuitively energized, "mysterious and non-sequential" (Noddings 1984, p. 7). To care is to "try to apprehend the reality of the other" (p. 14). One seeks to concretize the other's potentiality. One's need to promote self-progress ethically is the well spring of the ethical ideal for both in the teacher-pupil relationship. Succinctly stated, "the ethical self can emerge only from a caring for others" (p. 14). Personalized and particularized are the descriptors of the teacher-pupil relationship. In Noddings' view, a transformation of the other (the student) occurs but without a teacher-imposed objective. Relationships may vary but engrossment must occur. The person-caring must identify how he/she feels, what the other expects, and what is required in the relationship.

Concern for the Other

Concern for one's growth toward and ethical ideal energizes the relationship with the other. The caring relationship is harmonious, concrete, and present-centered. Possibility merges into actuality. Both develop. Similar to Buber (1955), the teacher-pupil relationship focuses on the pupil. The student is not a party to the educator's ethical progress. The relationship is non-impositional but is demanding and tough-minded. The pupil is expected to commit to the subject matter, the teacher's presence, and to continued personal growth.

Avoiding the intellectually abstract as well as scientific objectivity and conditioning, the one-caring refers to two criteria in judging the consequences of the act of caring: Does the action cause a favorable outcome for the cared-for? Secondly, does the one-caring display variability in behavior and emphasis in the educational association? Or is there evidence of dulling conformity and rule-bound rationalization in evaluating student projects and explanations (Noddings 1984, p. 25)?

Focus on the Student

Avoiding stereotyping or the use of psychological categories, the caring-one, the teacher, regards the other — the student — as multi-faceted, unique, and intriguing — one who can both surprise and confound the educator. For the teacher, subjectivity and intuition are

dominant themes in the association with the pupil, but rationality and objectivity are not excluded. There are times in the deeply human relationship when the educator needs to consider facts, systems, and principles for the long-term interests of the maturing student. Reflection and reflexivity (meditating on or considering oneself in the situation) are channels for the educator's understanding of the learning situation and on one's consciousness in that role. The teacher, the one who cares, encourages the growth of a complete human being — one who is active, striving, and feels deeply. This person is on the way to becoming. Engrossment — meeting the other as one caring — characterizes the teacher and the ambience of the relationship.

Courage and Feeling

Both must exhibit courage. Both can experience joy. For the educator, it is the release of the learner's powers. For the student, it is the apprehension of who one really is. It is an insight into the multiform potentiality of the self. The teacher shares in perceiving his/her growth toward an ideal self (Noddings 1984, p. 6). The one-caring receives the other and becomes a duality (p. 30). The other is welcomed — to ensure his/her growth, not absorbed to support the educator's ego. Within the relationship, the educator can grow in character and mind, but not at the expense of the other.

Feeling a combination of the reflective and reflexive, is the dynamic force in the relationship of teacher and pupil. Raw emotion and objective thought are transformed in the dialectic of one with the other. The transformation occurs in the ongoing cycle of separation and involvement in human relations. The student moves toward release from the educator to that of another and eventually adult freedom. Their's is an ethical relation. Its goal is the attainment of the ethical ideal, one's reality. In Noddings' words, "The greatest obligation of educators is to nurture the ethical ideal of those with whom they come into contact" (p. 49). Ethical considerations affect both partners in the teacher-pupil dialectic. Greater emphasis is on the student, the less mature one. Always, the teacher is more interested in the student than in the subject matter (p. 20).

Morality

Moral problems, challenges, and question structure the relationship. The educator is keenly aware of his/her position. In Noddings' view, it is a feminine morality — recognizing, even welcoming "feelings, conflicts, hopes, and ideas" (p. 8). The relationship is a moral experience based on a concrete, feeling-filled situation. Morality by justifications according to rational principles is the male orientation. One follows the voice of the father. Eschewing traditional, male logic and abstraction,

the feminine approach relating to the voice of the mother combines "memory, feelings, and capacities" (p. 8). It is a deeply human event in which intuition plays a powerful role (p. 7). Rules, formulas, and procedures lose their force. Dialogue, connectiveness, and acceptance are prioritized. Noddings suggests there is a need to transcend both the masculine and the feminine in the construction of a "new" morality (p. 6). The thrust of her work focuses on the feminine approach to morality, although males are not specifically excluded from practicing a caring approach.

Ethic of Caring

To Noddings, the ethic of caring is a combination of natural caring and a remembrance of it in our lives. To care is to react and receive because of the power of remembrance. To behave morally, one must experience the dialectic of caring about oneself as one caring (p. 82). The relation with the other is a continuing reciprocal interchange. The student's being cared for is superordinate to educational content or the teacher's progress. The ethical ideal, the goal of their relationship, is immediate, concrete, and physical. Universal principles, categories, and precepts are too abstract for the intensity of caring which is neither sentimental nor permissive. The feminist ethic is a tough ethic. It demands courage and commitment from both members. Both strive to

approach the ethical ideal. Again the teacher is both more mature and more muted in the focus on self, than in other human relationships. Joy is found in the quest and in attainments along the way toward the goal. Relatedness is the key to joy and the channel to the ethical ideal.

In education, and especially within the teacher-pupil relationship, the primary aim is to encourage caring and its nurturance of the ethical ideal. The teacher's every act has moral overtones (p. 179). To the student, learning the subject is secondary to becoming the caring person. The teacher-pupil relationship, feminist inspired, focuses on dialogue in choice of subject matter and its emphasis as well as in the personal exchange of educator with student. Accepted by the teacher, the student is confirmed as a person and as one capable of growth in talent and character.

Phenomenological Perspective

The implications of Merleau-Ponty's construct of the caring teacher-pupil relationship are rooted in his existential-phenomenological perspective on the human condition. Ambiguity, focus on the body, the significance of the act of choosing, intersubjectivity, and morality — all are key concepts in depicting and assessing the caring teacher-pupil relationship. He describes phenomenology as:

> the study of essences ... but phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their "facticity" ... phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy. (Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp. vii, viii)

Rooted in the world, his philosophy describes experience — especially human experience — directly, concretely, and without presuppositions of innate clarity or logical objectivity.

Ambiguity pervades all of life, in Merleau-Ponty's view, including the teacher-pupil relationship. Enigma, which can veil a promise or a threat in a relationship, affects both the educator and the student. Whatever the zeal to uncover information on a topic, background on the learner's interests, or procedures in teaching strategies, the educator deals with some sense of an enduring unknown. Each in the educational duo carry a burden of insecurity, a hint of anxiety, and a presentiment of the undiscovered in dealing with the other. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> All life is undeniably ambiguous, and there is never any way to know the true meaning of what we do. Perhaps our actions have no <u>single</u> true meaning. (1964a, p. 34)

<u>Culture and History</u>

As Noddings considers the social context of the relationship, Merleau-Ponty includes the cultural and historical milieu of individuals

and human relationships. Existing in a particular place and time affects individual existences and impacts persons in relationships. Ambiguity pervades the social world. The extent of personal freedom to alter one-self and to influence the other suggests numerous variations in choice and behavior. The confluence of historic epoch, cultural style, human uniqueness, and the contingent moment shapes a shared event filled with both the unknown and the familiar. What transpires and the wake of its consequences touch their lives and those others met in future associations.

The Other

The other becomes better known but remains elusive. Even one's own self can puzzle and confound. Each person in the relationship is a separate self but tied to the surrounding world. The intermingling of the two combine the clash and consanguinity of each self's universe. The person is "his body, his world, his situation, by a sort of exchange" (1964a, p. 72). The body in all its complexity defines both the person and its connection to others. "Just as one's body is tied to a certain world" (1962, p. 148). So, too, we can communicate in a multi-levelled manner with the other. Each facet of the person — physical, intellectual, emotional, social, aesthetic, spiritual, and intuitive — connects one to other people and provides access to the other being. Each — dwelling

within the cultural/historical experience — absorbs its influence and responds. We exist as individuals and as ones imprinted with a familial, cultural, and social code.

The Relationship

Gesture, word, and behavior hold meaning when the one responds to the other and connects with that being and her history. In the teacher-pupil relationship, the teacher bridges the gap. The student receives the educator's attention. The phenomenological body, in all its multifaceted complexity, is the self's world. The educator approaches each student as another world — connected with that of the educator and others, both visibly and invisibly. How the connection is made and the sensitivity of the experience determine the growth of the person and the strength of the learner's involvement with others. For peace and understanding, worlds need to respond amicably not as warring or isolationist planets. Merleau-Ponty captures the essence of the body, "our bodies bear witness to what we are; body and spirit express each other and cannot be separated" (1964a, p. 173).

Embodied, we recognize others existing in their body worlds. We feel a sense of kinship. I recognize the other and, at the same time, perceive the other resembles me. We are implanted in the shared world (1970, p. 122). We journey through time and space. Our mutuality and

singularity bear witness to the inheritance of our species and our human desire to leave our special imprint on the lives of others.

The teacher-pupil relationship is a special one. The educator facilitates the experience and can grow as a result of their meeting. Always the aim of the relationship is pupil growth — not the educator's self-aggrandizement. The student may be unaware of the educator's evolution. It is not his responsibility. The educator supplies the gift of freedom to the student to gain access to others' ideas, aesthetic perspectives, and projects. Eventually, the student is ready to leave the teacher to find another guide or to enter the adult world.

Freedom and Intersubjectivity

Freedom provides the energy to decide, to believe, and to act as one constructs a life. Merleau-Ponty describes personal freedom paradoxically, "We are never determined and ... we never change" (1964a, p. 21). Who we are and what are our relations to others are revealed in our self-initiated changes as well as in contacts with others in our shared time and space. Considered as well as unplanned acts reflect personal initiative as well as behaviors rooted in our primordial inheritance. At our most unique we remain part of the species' history. Our freedom exists within that horizon. Reason and unreason as well as order and disorder intermingle in our shared and individual lives. We learn to deal

with both and accept their presences. Our freedom is extensive but with definite limitations. Cultural, social, historical, familial, and contemporary conditions define our place and our opportunity to redefine the experience. Living in shared worlds, we recognize our freedoms depend on one another. Merleau-Ponty reminds us, "all attempts to live apart were hypocritical because we are all mysteriously related, because others ... become an inalienable dimension in our lives ... become in fact ourselves ... our freedom waits for the recognition of other people" (1964a, p. 45). Essentially, we exist for others, and they us. The educator's sensitivity and insight are crucial in guiding, explaining, and permitting student centeredness in the human condition.

Intersubjectivity is the defining concept for Merleau-Ponty, "Philosophy is meditating on intersubjectivity" (1964a, p. 34). We dialogue with one and other in a shared time and place as well as with past generations and other epochs. The teacher-pupil relationship connects today with yesterday as well as with tomorrow, and persons encounter one another.

The interlocking of one's sense of singularity and of inclusive universality in the intersubjective moment demands sensitivity to the other(s). Merleau-Ponty captures the moment:

> From the moment I recognize that my experience ... makes me accessible to what is not myself, that I am sensitive to

> the world and to others ... I recognize my life seems absolutely individual and universal to me. (1964a, p. 94)

Seeking truth, we find it together in the shared moment. Rooted in the historic process, we define and redefine the truth as the situation evolves and transmutes its meaning (1964b, p. 109). The other is partner, a reflection of myself. The other is not an alien but "a generalized I" (1973, p. 138).

Morality

The connection of one with the other — including the teacher-pupil relationship — is essentially a moral one. It is a morality based in the human condition of shared suffering and joy. Non-absolutist and dynamic, it evolves from and directs the association of one with the other. To Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysical and moral consciousness dies upon contact with the absolute" (1964a, p. 95). We live in a contingent world in which choice and circumstance redefine our sense of being and our construct of the world.

It is a morality for the courageous, the risk taker, and the one who accepts the intrusion of the unexpected in one's life. Morality, product of dialogue with others, is not a recitation of rules (1964a, p. 4). In the teacher-pupil relationship the educator serves as a model of the courageous one. The teacher does not expect moral clones but does

encourage thought, feeling, and action reflecting fully responsible awareness of others in dealing with moral dilemmas. The complex interchange between person and situation in dealing with moral questions in caught by Merleau-Ponty:

> True morality does not consist in following exterior rules or in respecting objective values. There are no ways to be just or to be saved.... It consists of actively being what we are by chance, of establishing that communication with others and with ourselves for which our temporal structure gives us the opportunity and of which our liberty is only the rough outline. (1964a, p. 40)

He would urge us to pay attention to "the good faith, the loyalty to promises, the respect for others, the generosity and the seriousness" (1964a, p. 40), not just of literary figures but more importantly to reflect them in ourselves and in our relationships with others.

Comparison and Contrast of the Two Perspectives

The presentation of both perspectives reveals points of similarity as well as of difference. Each offers a perspective on the teacher-pupil relationship. Does one have a more relevant or deeper message for the core educational association? Is each singular, unique, and appropriate in its contribution to an enlivened and humanly significant relationship? Would both be enriched with the other's interpretation and implementation of the relation of teacher and pupil?

Considering some points of similarity, both relate to the existential interpretation of life and the importance of human relationships. Buber's I-Thou relationship of teacher and pupil is identifiable in Noddings' work. Merleau-Ponty's focus on relationships, dialogue, and process in situations is comparable. Neither reflects Buber's spirituality and mysticism. Freedom, choice making, and complete involvement of the individual in the human condition are conceptually similar. Courage, described in Merleau-Ponty's hero (1964a, p. 186), reflects a shared concern. Intuition (feminine or phenomenological) is significant in choice making and human relationships. Morality, to both, is non-absolutist, non-impositional, and dynamic. Individual choice making constructs the solution to moral dilemmas. Both include concreteness and an emphasis on the immediate in defining values, forming relationships, and signifying the impact of the individual on an experience. Invoking intellectual abstractions or scientific rules are escapist routes from the world of human dilemmas and triumphs.

Turning to some areas of difference in conceptual emphasis or description, joy is described by Noddings as the accomplishment of the ethical ideal. To Noddings, joy for the educator is facilitating the release of the student's powers. For the student, it is recognizing who one is. The educator must have an ongoing cognition of his/her own selfhood to

initiate the process. The educator gains in personal growth as the student evolves. Joy, in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, though not directly named, can be connected with his view of the hero. In Sense and Non-Sense, he cites Saint-Exupery and the goal of the hero: "It is not death that I love ... but life" (1964a, p. 186). The hero is one who plunges into life — confronting, challenging, coping, failing, as well as triumphing. This is the heroic joy of being in life, not escaping from it whatever the burden of anxiety and ambiguity. Joy can be construed as the reward of the authentic life.

> Today's hero is not skeptical, dilettantish, or decadent; he has simply experienced chance, disorder, and failure ... he lives at a time when duties and tasks are unclear. He has a sharper sense of human liberty and of the contingency of the future ... nothing is certain — But sometimes ... there is ... that moment of victory. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 186)

Morality implemented in a demanding ethical code is the authentic choice. Whether Merleau-Ponty would use the term ethical ideal is conjectural. The phrase seems idealistic and perfectionist for a philosophy pervaded with ambiguity, contingency, and process.

Noddings attends to society, its institutions, and their impact on human relationships — with special emphasis on the educational domain. Merleau-Ponty considers the interaction of culture, universal human tendencies, and the socio-political world. Individuality, the significance of decision making, and freedom appear less clear cut, more complex, and

enigmatic than in Noddings' narrative. Ambiguity, in particular, pervades Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. At some points, it is inferred in Noddings' work, but not directly addressed. Each, in his or her way, centers on human relationships.

Noddings' focus is on the teacher-pupil relationship — but with many examples of mother-child caring. The personal and particular loom large in her discussion. Individuality, adult relationships (literary, personal, and historical) explicate Merleau-Ponty's perspective on the subject-other connection. His exploration of intersubjectivity — the connection of all persons historically and culturally — provides a sense of universality to his person-centered philosophy.

Caring, the teacher's engrossment of the pupil, is Noddings' central thesis. To Noddings, caring depends in part on one's memory of caring — receiving as well as giving. One wonders the fate of some who have little or no memory of being encompassed in the warmth of an accepting and prizing relationship. Unhappily, the rise of senseless brutality and apathy toward human suffering is traceable, in many instances, to a childhood bereft of empathic human associations. How would Merleau-Ponty describe the association of teacher and pupil? Relating to his rich but complex work, one can infer some conceptual emphases. One the educator's part, one would expect a simultaneous

recognition of personal selfhood, stake in the human condition, and part in universal intersubjectivity. They shape the demands and rewards in the relationship for the educator. Process and outcomes are evaluated in reference to the educator's personally constructed moral code. The relationship is a freeing one for the student. As the other, one with a multifaceted potentiality, the learner is rooted in and contributor to culture, society, and family. Puzzlement, anxiety, and challenge are met by the educator with courage, some trepidation, and confidence in the promise of youth.

Differences in the emphasis or the consequences of the two models of the teacher-pupil relationship may be traceable to the inclusion of the phenomenological approach in one and the avoidance of it in the other. Noddings decries the phenomenologist's notion of "the infallibility of basic intuitions" (Noddings 1984, p. 32). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological stand is tentative. The philosopher interrogates the world. He speaks of phenomenology's unfinished nature and "the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. xxi). In The Prose of the World, he states

> Perception opens us to a world already constituted and can only reconstitute it.... The meaning of the perceived object already is the shadow cast by the operations we bring to bear upon things. It is nothing other than our viewpoint on them, our situation with respect to them. (1973, p. 124)

This philosophy casts a tentative, time processed and place centered look at the people and objects in the world. His philosophy is one of interrogation not infallibility. The being of the core educational relationship is encompassed in the surrounding world. The authentic educator perceives — has a perceptual faith — in sensing and knowing the significance of the connection with the pupil. Yet, he/she recognizes its fluid nature and the ephemeral quality of objective descriptions and categorical assertions of human relationships.

Conclusion

Each philosopher contributes an interpretation to human relationships Their standpoints differ. Noddings directly describes the teacher-pupil relationship. Merleau-Ponty's contribution is by implication. The Noddings' version is directly applicable to American education. Merleau-Ponty's message must be sought. When discovered, the message is clear in its attention to the human. Its exact message is tinged with the ultimate mystery of human life, individual destiny, and the disappointment and triumph of shared lives. The very paradox and question of relationships, particularly the teacher-pupil relationship, may best be seen in Merleau-Ponty's vision. But specific characteristics and outcomes lie with each teacher and student linked in the educational event.

One seeking to identify the caring teacher-pupil relationship would profit by consulting both models — the personal and particular focus as well as the universal and cultural design.

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